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ACADEMIC REGRESSION DURING PANDEMIC: STUDY

The Loss of Learning During the Pandemic study reveals 92% kids lost at least one specific language ability from the previous year

NEGATIVE IMPACT ON LEARNING LEVELS OF KIDS

The language ability lost includes describing a picture or their experiences orally; reading familiar words; reading with comprehension. The study on primary school children, carried out by Azim Premji Univ, highlights the negative impact on the learning levels of children due to prolonged closure of schools and suggests immediate action to rectify the regression | P2

SCRAP VACATIONS, REDRAW SYLLABI

- 82% of children have lost at least one specific mathematical ability like identifying single and two-digit numbers; using basic problem solving operations; describing 2D/3D shapes
- Report suggests measures like eliminating vacations, extending academic year, reconfiguring syllabus as ways to arrest the slide

16,067

KIDS OF MP, CHHATTISGARH, KARNATAKA, RAJASTHAN AND UTTARAKHAND SURVEYED

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VIJAYAPURAM • KOLLAM • WARANGAL • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

Amid full-blown freedom of speech spat with Twitter, govt begins Kooing

BISMAH MALIK @ Bengaluru

CAUGHT in the eye of a political storm over the ongoing farmer protests, US social media giant Twitter on Wednesday said it had suspended more than 500 of the 1,178 accounts the ministry of electronics and information technology ordered it to remove citing the possibility of inciting violence and threat to national security.

However, the site took a dig at the government saying the others were not suspended as the blocking orders were not consistent with Indian law. "Keeping with our principles of defending protected speech and freedom of expression, we have not taken any action on accounts that consist of news media entities, journalists, activists, and politicians. To do so, we believe, would violate their fundamental right to free expression under Indian law," Twitter said.

The ministry termed Twitter's statement as 'unusual', posting its response first on a rival platform, Koo, which garnered more than three million downloads in two days.

"Upon the request of Twitter seeking a meeting with the government, the Secretary IT was to engage with senior management of Twitter. In this light a blog post published prior to this engagement is unusual. The government will share its response soon," Meity said in a statement.

Fully Indian firm

Aprameya R, the co-founder and CEO of Koo, said it is an India registered firm backed by investors like 3one4 capital. A Chinese investor, Shunwei, is also a shareholder, but will exit fully

The Centre had last week warned Twitter of legal action under Section 69(A) of the Information Technology Act, which provides for imprisonment up to seven years besides a penalty, if it fails to take down the 1,178 accounts.

Legal experts told TNIE that Twitter may have very few options since it has only partly complied with the government's orders, while free speech activists denounced the government's crackdown on social media by using 'legal weapons'.

India remains a key market for the social media giant with more than 75 million active users, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi who has a 65.5 million strong user base with his key cabinet colleagues as well as government departments active on the site.

Industries and Commerce minister Piyush Goyal, IT minister Ravi Shankar Prasad, BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra and Bollywood actress Kangana Ranaut were amongst those who shifted to the 'desi' rival Koo, which also onboarded key government departments on Wednesday.

Shed status quo mindset and let new laws help empower small farmers, urges PM

Ready for talks, says Modi while backing reforms

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

NOBODY had asked for the triple talaq or dowry laws, but they were still enacted, for reforms must be attuned with changing times, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Wednesday as he rebutted the Opposition's charge that farmers had not sought the contentious agri reform laws.

Wrapping up the Lok Sabha debate on the Motion of Thanks to the President's address, Modi reiterated his government's willingness to resume talks while describing the laws as progressive.

"Besides creating an additional, but optional, avenue has there been any change after the enactment of the laws? When the laws offer only an option, there can't be any reason for protest," he reasoned.

Conceding that 100% acceptance to any new measure was not possible, Modi, however, said progress could not be gained without shedding the status quo mindset.

Recalling the late farmer leader Chaudhary Charan Singh's words on farm fragmentation, he said: "We cannot progress if we do not care for small farmers, who constitute 80% of the farming community. Fragmentation is a reality, and this is what the farmers' producers organisations aim to address."

"A new world order is in the making in the post-Corona era, and we have to choose between being a mute spectator and making reforms. An Atmanirbhar Bharat will play a crucial role in the new world order," the prime minister asserted.

When Congress members began disrupting his speech, Modi took potshots at them, saying it was divided and confused. "The party has different stands in Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha. It can neither work for its own good nor solve the country's challenges," he said even as Congress and TMC members staged a walk-out.

He also made a distinction between *andolankari* (protesters)and *andolan jivi* (professional protesters), saying the former is pious while the latter is an anarchist. The *kisan andolan* is pious, he said. P10

AGITATION PATH

On 77th day of their protest on the borders of the National Capital, the Samyukta Kisan Morcha on Tuesday prepared a detailed pan-India protest plan. The finer details will be decided later

FEB 12: All toll plazas in Rajasthan will be made toll free

FEB 14: Candle and mashaal march across the country

FEB 16: Solidarity day to mark birth anniversary of Sir Chhotu Ram

FEB 18: Four-hour rail roko across the country

Rescue operations continue at Tapovan Tunnel in Joshimath on Thursday | SHEKHAR YADAV

SEARCH SUFFERS FOR WANT OF LAYOUT; DIRECTION CHANGED

VINEET UPADHYAY @ Tapovan (Uttarakhand)

IT'S not just the topography that has made the rescue of 37 workers stuck in the Tapovan tunnel following flash floods on Sunday difficult. "For the first two days, we were blind," said a rescue official as they did not have the layout of the tunnels they were negotiating with. The layout was shared only on Tuesday and a course correction was ordered the next day.

Till Wednesday, the assumption was 37 workers were trapped at a point 180 metres deep into the Tapovan tunnel at a bend, which was why sludge was cleared up to 130 metres and beyond. The plan changed to start drilling the ground at 70-75 metres inside the tunnel to reach a silt filtration tunnel there, as officials now think the workers could be trapped there. The decision was taken at a meeting of state officials, the Armed Forces and the NTPC.

Confirming the change, R Raman, commissioner of Garhwal division, told *TNIE*, "Information is constantly emerging and developing because everything is based on anticipation on the basis of the tunnel's layout. Today we found that the sludge is pushing back from the tunnel. A consensus was reached to look for the workers in silt filtration tunnel below the tunnel."

Why the Hyderabad-based tunnel developer, Rithwik Projects Pvt Ltd, took this long to share the layout when network connectivity was available and the company's officers were very much on site boggles the mind. P8

SITE SCAM

Four BDA engineers arrested

S LALITHA @ Bengaluru

FOUR engineers of the Bengaluru Development Authority, including an Assistant Engineer (AE) who was to retire this month, were arrested by the Seshadripuram police on Tuesday night for malpractices in the allotment of sites.

They allegedly connived with agents as well as BDA's Revenue Department to create false documents to allot sites, said highly-placed BDA sources.

Ten more BDA employees are likely to be arrested in the case soon, the sources added.

All the arrested were working at the BDA North office at R T Nagar when they created false Correct Dimension (CD) reports. They are three AEs -- M S Shankar Murthy (who was transferred to BBMP two months ago), K N Ravikumar and Shabir Ahmed, and D Sriram, an Assistant Executive Engineer. Ahmed was to retire by February-end.

The CD report gives all details on the dimension of the site, its location and surroundings and is a crucial document in site allotment, an official said. The arrested officials created fake CDs for sites measuring 20x30 sqft and 20x40 sqft. Sriram and Ahmed have each created 14 such reports, while Murthy seven and Ravikumar five.

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FEBRUARY 9

THE COLDEST NIGHT

According to data from the IMD, many districts in Karnataka reported a drastic dip in mercury levels, ranging between 9°C and 14°C | P2

New sand policy to aid end-users: Nirani

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

To ensure end-users get sand at a nominal price and without hassles, the Karnataka Government will soon come out with a new sand policy, Mines and Geology Minister Murugesh Nirani announced here on Wednesday.

The government is taking a number of measures to streamline the system and the new policy will ensure uniform prices for sand transportation in gram panchayat limits. The department has fixed ₹300/tonne for extracting sand from gorge, streams and reserves for construction of houses under government schemes and other construction activities at gram panchayat level. "Only 183 blocks are allowed across Karnataka. Cess will be levied on tipper, lorry and other vehicles transporting sand and no charges for transporting sand in bullock carts and two-wheelers. Transportation of sand from one district to another will not be allowed and must be transported within jurisdictional limits. However, permits will be needed to transport sand for commercial purposes and from one district to another," he said. P6

Surprise disengagement at LAC as China, India pull back vehicles

MAYANK SINGH AND PUSHKAR BANAKAR @ New Delhi

AFTER a nine-month-long stand-off along the Line of Actual Control in Eastern Ladakh, the situation appeared to ease a tad on Wednesday as both China and India began a "synchronized and organised" disengagement process.

While Indian sources said it was limited to armoured vehicles, the Chinese Ministry of National Defence claimed that the frontline troops from both sides along the Pangong Tso had started disengaging.

Senior Colonel Wu Qian, spokesperson for the Chinese Ministry of National Defence, said: "The Chinese and Indian frontline troops at the southern and northern banks of the Pangong Tso started synchronized and organised disengagement from February 10." It was in accordance with the consensus at the ninth round of China-India Corps Commander level meeting, he added.

From the Indian side, a senior Army officer confirmed the pullback of armoured vehicles, including infantry combat vehicles. "The armoured vehicles are moving back but troops at the frontline have not been thinned," he said.

The disengagement is expected to happen in phases, another senior officer said. "The infantry moving back will be the last step; it will depend on compliance of the phased disengagement from the Chinese side," the officer said.

The disengagement began on a day when the Chinese Ambassador to India, Sun Weidong, in an article said that the two countries should meet each other half way in addressing problems while putting the boundary issue in an appropriate place in bilateral ties.

EXPRESS READ

'No more minimum amount for FASTag'

New Delhi: The National Highways Authority of India on Wednesday said it has decided to do away with the requirement of maintaining a minimum amount in FASTag wallet. The move aims at ensuring seamless movement at toll plazas.

JDS won't contest bypolls: Deve Gowda

Raichur: JDS patriarch H D Deve Gowda on Wednesday said his party will not contest bypolls for the Belgaum Lok Sabha segment, and Basavakalyan, Sindgi and Maski Assembly seats, stating that the party lacks the funds to do so | P4

BUSTED AT KIA

Dubai passenger flies in with 4 drones, caught

S LALITHA @ Bengaluru

WHILE the government has been droning on for some time about the dangers of "uncontrolled civilians" flying drones, there is a black market thriving for these unmanned aerial vehicles. Though the government has put a long list of restrictions for enthusiasts and professionals using drones, the market is growing at a whopping 40 per cent per year, according to some estimates.

In the latest incident, a passenger from Dubai flew in with four China-made drones and landed straight in the net of Customs officials at the Kempegowda International Airport early on Wednesday morning.

The China-made drones that were seized from a passenger from Dubai.

The 25-year-old passenger also had four latest iPhones in his check-in baggage and 1.3 kg of gold in paste in his rectum and socks. The total value of the items seized was ₹75,12,181.

The customs officials caught him at 3 am after he alighted from the Emirates flight (EK-568). "It is a rare seizure. Forget four, we don't even allow one drone per passenger," said a senior customs official.

CONTINUED ON: P7

Each drone priced at ₹1.2 lakh

The China-made drone was DJI Phantom 4PRO+V2.0 model, which costs around ₹1,19,900. The passenger had four of them, with a total value of ₹6.6 lakh